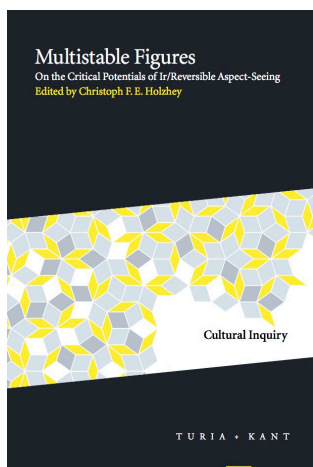


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BRIGITTE BARGETZ 

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An Everyday Perspective

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# FIGURING AMBIVALENCE, CAPTURING THE POLITICAL

An Everyday Perspective

Brigitte Bargetz<sup>1</sup>

The notion of ambivalence currently seems to be an invigorating figure with heuristic potential in political, social, and art theory.<sup>2</sup> It refers to a plurality of possibilities, a paradoxical multiplicity, and a complex relationality. It foregrounds thinking in terms of indeterminacy and incommensurability, as well as in terms of the possible. Ambivalence has been deployed in positive ways, as offering political promise, while, at the same time, being regarded with suspicion.

Even though ambivalence is popular, it often remains vague. This paper aims at contributing to a clarification of this notion by drawing on Henri Lefebvre's critical theory of the everyday.<sup>3</sup> Through the way he refers to the notions of ambivalence and ambiguity, Lefebvre describes a complex relation between conditions and events, between the virtual and the actual. Reading his theory against the background of current political theories, I will unfold a conceptualization of ambivalence that may inspire a delineation of the political, focusing on questions around subjects and agency, decisions and un/decidability. I will propose reading Lefebvre's theory of the everyday as a contribution to political and social theory, emphasizing how subjects are involved in and attached to political moments of a certain historical present. For in his theory, the everyday is not conceived as separate from the sites of politics and economics, but is instead closely related to them, embodying their 'immanent force'.<sup>4</sup> I will explore how Lefebvre's notion of ambivalence allows us to theorize individuals' complex and complicated involvement in relations of power and domination without relying on absolute determinism or on the idea of a sovereign resistant subject. Such thinking informs a theory of the political that highlights the subject without, however, falling into the traps of an individualistic perspective. Instead, it attends to the way subjects are binding and bound to specific historical moments and conditions. Thus, it helps to reconfigure a more nuanced understanding of political agency as a force of change as well as of maintenance, exercised 'within the spaces of ordinariness', within

the everyday.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, it allows for investigating normative questions when thinking about political strategies. Here, I propose an understanding of ambivalence that is neither only positive nor merely critical, since it informs both processes of domination and modes of disruption. I begin by engaging with political conceptualizations of ambivalence, which relate to different historical moments as well as to different modes and mechanisms of ambivalence. In order to explore the theories' conceptual potentials, I refer to the figures of multiplicity and multistability. While this perspective makes it possible to introduce questions about subjects and agency, it also reveals the limits when it comes to theorizing the role of individuals' practices. For further elaboration on this point, I engage with Henri Lefebvre's critical theory of the everyday. His writings on ambivalence and ambiguity, as I will illustrate, refer to individuals' practices, and open up a thorough and complex way to relate moments of process and decision. I will conclude by elaborating on how this assemblage of ambivalence and ambiguity can offer inspiring insights for a theory of the political and refine an understanding of political agency.

#### **POLITICS, MULTIPLICITY, AND MULTISTABILITY**

Poststructuralist and postmodern critiques of Western grand narratives have challenged certain characteristics of Western modernity. Instead of rationality, knowledge, progress, and certainty, notions such as fragmentation, chaos, uncertainty, contingency, and paradox have become central topics in political philosophy and social theory. In the following section I sketch out four theories, putting different figures of ambivalence in focus. Drawing on these figures, each theory attempts to move away from determinist thinking of the political and of social formation and instead sheds light on modes of political agency. Each theory not only requires a specific conceptual tool, but also refers to a particular historical moment as well as to a particular political mode of being. While I explore these theories separately, I end up discussing how they mobilize figures of multiplicity and multistability. This framework helps to illustrate the differences, and even more so the theoretical and political flaws, when ambivalence is understood as mere plurality without acknowledging matters of power. Furthermore, the figure of multistabil-

ity also leads us to questions of subjectivity and decision-making and opens perspectives that help to epitomize political agency.

#### THE POLITICAL DYNAMICS OF AMBIVALENCE AND THE DELUSIVE BELIEF IN COHERENCE

In his book *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991) Zygmunt Bauman argues for the political recognition of ambivalence.<sup>6</sup> He argues that the fight against ambivalence in (Western) modernity<sup>7</sup> has not simply failed, but has rather provoked new ambivalences that, according to him, have largely contributed to a politics of violence, such as Othering, exclusion, and even genocide. Bauman defines ambivalence as ‘the possibility of assigning an object or an event to more than one category’.<sup>8</sup> Conceived as ‘disorder’, ambivalence evokes a feeling of ‘discomfort’<sup>9</sup> because situations can be read in multiple ways and thus imply the necessity of deciding between alternatives. Identified with a ‘feeling of indecision’, ‘undecidability’, and thus with ‘chaos and lack of control, and hereby frightening’, ambivalence is juxtaposed – a necessary corollary – to the promise of a coherent world and the ‘quest for order’.<sup>10</sup> Order, Bauman claims, becomes an ‘obsession’,<sup>11</sup> while ambivalence is ‘marked for extinction’.<sup>12</sup> Here, ambivalence does not point to contradictory positions or interests. Rather, it is implying a dominant value or belief that marks a political moment and historical time, and the way people attach to it. Modernity’s aspiration to regulate social questions technologically represents for Bauman an effect of this belief in and search for coherence. As such, this belief has both constituted the conditions of the Holocaust and legitimized it: ‘Without being the sufficient cause of the genocide, modernity is its necessary condition.’<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, the desire for order produces disorder. Hence, ambivalence was not only fought against in modern societies but was also further engineered throughout this struggle. This suggests that ambivalence is inherent to modernity, in so far as modernity produces what it has been meant to extinguish. As modernity’s ‘waste’, ambivalence is a trope of ‘the other of order’.<sup>14</sup>

Bauman criticizes the ignoring of ambivalence and instead insists on its acknowledgment, which means teasing out its opportunities and risks. While unravelling the ‘emancipatory potential of contingency-as-destiny’, he addresses the problematic aspects of ambivalence by revealing, for example, the ‘burden’ of the ‘privatization of ambivalence’.<sup>15</sup> The retreat of the modern state and the increase of consumer culture, he

argues, create the problem of individualization, that is, the necessity that 'individuals must face the problem of ambivalence alone'.<sup>16</sup> For Bauman, ambivalence constitutes a critical category for grasping Western modern, as well as postmodern, political and social conditions, and attempting to expunge it produces only more ambivalence. Instead, ambivalence has to be acknowledged as a social and political force without ignoring its problematic implications.

#### AN AMBIVALENT WORLD AND THE FIGURE OF 'AND'

While Bauman regards ambivalence as a politically specific dimension in modern Western societies, Ulrich Beck considers it as a politically and socially emerging moment in late modernity: the so-called second or reflexive modernity. This new 'age of ambivalence',<sup>17</sup> he argues, has been emerging since the end of the Cold War, picturing the end of class antagonism and the rise of a new political force, namely the global threat of risks. While Bauman unmasks modernity's deluded faith in certainty, Beck points to the transformation from (modern) certainty to the uncertainty of the 'risk society'.<sup>18</sup> This uncertainty is to be found in an increasing individualization as well as in new nuclear and ecological risks, which have spread globally beyond national borders – as the tragic example of Chernobyl demonstrated. These new threats, however, are only one part of the story. Its other part, Beck emphasizes, consists of an increasing number of possibilities that he metaphorically describes with the simple word 'and'.<sup>19</sup> This 'and' becomes apparent, for instance, 'in a contradictory multiple engagement' in which it is possible to think and act 'as a right-winger *and* a left-winger, radically *and* conservatively, democratically *and* undemocratically, politically *and* unpolitically, all at the same time'.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, common political coordinates like 'right and left, conservative and socialistic, retreat and participation'<sup>21</sup> are also no longer relevant. While in Beck's view, in modern times politics had been frozen in a Schmittian friend–enemy dialectics, the rising reflexive modernization opens up new possibilities for thinking and acting beyond these distinctions. Hence, the end of political contradictions also manifests itself in new possibilities for political agency outside traditional political institutions like the state or corporations. Introducing the term 'subpolitics',<sup>22</sup> Beck identifies these new possibilities in social movements or civic engagement.

For Beck, ambivalence characterizes both the political and the conceptual frame for imagining new political forms. 'And' points at a plu-

rality of possibilities: a plurality that includes and relates seemingly incommensurable positions. With the figure of 'and', he not only underlines shifting realities but also emphasizes the requirement to think politics anew. The end of dialectic politics should also lead to an end of dialectical thinking. Tired of the mourning of political pessimism, he advocates instead – as his book title indicates – a reinvention of politics as a politics of the possible.

Both Beck and Bauman criticize political determinism with the figure of ambivalence – Beck by interrogating a pre-given political frame, Bauman by questioning technological endeavours as a remedy for social and political problems as well as for narratives of finality. At the same time, while Beck stresses a new political plurality and political agency, also beyond traditional political institutions, he largely ignores those powerful implications of ambivalence on which Bauman explicitly focuses.<sup>23</sup>

#### COLONIAL AMBIVALENCE

While Bauman refers to ambivalence as a rather general Western modern principle, Homi Bhabha perceives ambivalence as part of a specific power relation, namely the colonial relation. Bhabha turns to the idea of ambivalence in order to challenge and undo the monolithic binary logic of the relation between colonizers and colonized; for such a binary leaves no possibilities for resistance and agency. Instead, he highlights the colonized subject and considers within 'the ambivalence of colonial discourse'<sup>24</sup> an empowering potential for those who are discriminated against. For Bhabha, there is an ambivalence in the relation between colonizer and colonized, evident in the inability of the postcolonial authority to identically reproduce itself. 'The ambivalence of colonial authority repeatedly turns from *mimicry* – a difference that is almost nothing but not quite – to *menace* – a difference that is almost total but not quite.'<sup>25</sup> Ambivalence provides a political figure of 'in-between',<sup>26</sup> and indicates that the colonizer's position is altered. Without ignoring the hierarchical relation between colonizer and colonized, Bhabha also conceives a rupture: 'disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority'.<sup>27</sup> Ambivalence is then the mode through which Bhabha sees colonial power as never fully coherent, uniform, and static, but as an unstable colonial authority. This carries with it the possibility of its own undoing.

Bhabha insists on the ambivalent structure as well as the functioning of colonial power because it allows him to identify possible sites for subaltern resistance and agency. 'The ambivalence of mimicry – almost but not quite – suggests that the fetishized colonial culture is potentially and strategically an insurgent counter-appeal.'<sup>28</sup> His idea of ambivalence emphasizes incompleteness and constant modifications within colonial discourse, indicating disruptions, inconveniences, and insecurities of colonial representation. In doing so, Bhabha interrogates a rigid conception of power and domination – one that fosters a dualistic offender-victim understanding. At the same time, his idea of resistance and agency stemming from the ambivalence of the colonial discourse does not primarily point to a conscious and intentional subject, but is rather considered as an effect of the colonial process itself.

#### A QUEER-FEMINIST POLITICS OF PARADOX

While ambivalence is Bhabha's figure of departure for challenging binary thinking, it is the notion of paradox that opens up such a potential for Antke Engel. Her starting point is not a postcolonial critique, but a queer-feminist one, for the emphasis on paradox enables her to unfold a critique of heteronormativity and to stress a politics of potentiality from a queer-feminist perspective.<sup>29</sup> Engel aims at 'challenging the heterosexual norm and the premise of binary gender difference' as well as the 'complementary, hierarchical divide of subject and object of desire'.<sup>30</sup> Like Bhabha, she wishes to move beyond the idea of coherence and simple binary oppositions and argues for anti-identitarian and destabilizing politics. Turning to paradox is important for her because it enables the renegotiation of understandings of power that – implicitly or explicitly – rely on the idea of antagonism. Such exploration of the concept of power seeks to address the question of agency, as it did for Bhabha. Paradox, Engel argues, carries a political potential as an anti- and non-hegemonic strategy. While, for Bhabha, ambivalence constitutes a critical figure for questioning the alleged closure and coherence of colonial power in depicting a space in-between, Engel deploys the figure of paradox in order to map queer political strategies beyond identitarian logics. Here, paradox is not only some condition to be uncovered and appropriated politically: rather, a 'queer politics of paradox'<sup>31</sup> implies a normative dimension. In other words, paradox is not only a means but also an end: something to be achieved. Against traditional political theory that relates paradox to 'inauthenticity or alienation' but

also against a 'depoliticized pluralism',<sup>32</sup> Engel's queer paradoxical politics suggests an intervention into hegemonic regimes. It may trouble rigid and binary identity constructions and, through its paradoxical pleasures, fuel political struggles. For her, such a queer politics is possible despite the tendency of a neoliberal politics of paradox, which she identifies in the simultaneous demand of freedom and responsibility.

In order to be able to grasp the queer political potential of paradox, Engel insists upon distinguishing between the notions of paradox, ambiguity, and contradiction. She defines paradox as a permanent state of tension, set in motion through the relation between incompatible elements. Unlike paradox, ambiguities do not imply incompatibility, but undecidability. Here, the relation is produced through 'continuously shifting perspectives'.<sup>33</sup> Ambiguities point to polysemy, which can neither be dissolved nor fixed. Like paradox, contradiction implies incompatible oppositions. In contrast to the figure of the paradox, however, contradiction requires that the entities constituting it are identifiable and separable. Thus, paradox mediates between ambiguity and contradiction,<sup>34</sup> indicating that it can turn to both relative ambiguity and antagonistic contradiction.

For Engel, paradox points at politics beyond the 'illusion of coherence', recognizing that processes of identity construction and collectivities are always 'precarious and provisional'.<sup>35</sup> Following poststructuralist debates about the political, which emphasize politics as precarious acts of closure and argue against pre-given foundations for politics, Engel promotes an understanding of doing politics as making 'decisions under conditions of undecidability'.<sup>36</sup> On the one hand, this implies fostering an agonistic, rather than a consensual, understanding of politics given that paradox refers to tensions. On the other hand, Engel emphasizes politics in terms of decisions. Resisting familiar decisions and introducing instead uncertainty or at least delay, a politics of paradox may entail a multiplication of possibilities, a troubling of stabilities, and the deferral of decisions. Unlike Beck, who focuses on the possibilities that come along with political ambivalence and thus plurality, Engel also accentuates the problematics related to a politics of paradox. She refers to the possible alliances between neoliberal and queer paradoxical politics, both of which point at the impossibility of closures, although from different angles. Furthermore, she criticizes the model of plurality that relies on the integration and recognition of minorities without changing the hegemonic political horizon.<sup>37</sup> For Engel, a politics of par-



adox does not uncritically affirm plurality, nor does it ignore existing power relations. It may be at the same time problematic and anticipatory. It describes both ongoing neoliberal politics and non-hegemonic, non-normative, and non-identitarian queer strategies. Acknowledging the paradox of neoliberal politics, Engel nonetheless emphasizes its subversive potential. Her conceptual and political aim is a critique of identity politics, which relies on binary identitarian logics. With the concept of the paradox, she not only sharpens the problematics related to binary models, but also suggests a framework for thinking about ways of transgressing such models.

#### POLITICAL MULTIPLICITY AND/OR MULTISTABILITY?

All four approaches use different figures of multiplicity in order to display a diagnosis of a certain political moment, describing specific political modes and reconsidering politics in terms of political potentiality, as well as (non-normative and non-coherent) political strategies. The theories aim to reject determinism while exploring how, in different ways, political agency might be redefined through an emphasis on plurality, incoherence, ruptures, and undecidability as moments where agency may reside and from where it may evolve. The concepts of ambivalence and paradox, as well as the figure of 'and', hint at a critique of coherence and certainty, at an impossibility of total closure, as well as at a plurality of possibilities. Bauman's notion of ambivalence and Beck's figure of 'and' assume polysemy and the coexistence of various possibilities that are simultaneously at work. As Bauman concedes, ambivalence is the possibility of grasping one event or object in different ways. Although he considers ambivalence in terms of multiplicity, he does not posit it uncritically. Unlike Beck, who stresses an understanding of plurality as desirable and even emancipatory, Bauman also problematizes such a multiplicity of choices. Ambivalence is, for instance, problematic when it leaves the individuals alone with their choices. Hence, it does not simply indicate the possibility of grasping an event in different ways; nor is it merely the inevitable product of striving for certainty. For Bauman, the notion of ambivalence also hints at the necessity to decide. Stressing this point of ambivalence beyond simple plurality may best be seen through the figure of multistability. Multistable figures such as the Rubin vase or Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit do not refer to an unlimited number of possibilities. Since it is impossible to see both figures at the same time, multistable figures evoke the viewer's need to

decide between seeing the two faces or the vase, the duck or the rabbit.<sup>38</sup> Multistability thus implies both undecidability and the need to decide. The coexistence of possibilities neither indicates infinity nor offers synthesis. Apprehending ambivalence and paradox as figures of multistability evokes an understanding of not only multiple but also related aspects and realities. While the figure of multiplicity as well as Beck's figure of 'and' indicates multiplication, endless plurality, and the equal coexistence of different possibilities, multistability articulates the relative stability of existing conditions, as well as the need to decide.

Referring to the elaborated theories, the figure of multistability is intriguing because it helps to reveal crucial political and theoretical consequences. It allows for a critique of postmodern plurality understood as 'anything goes', and relates to questions of structures, conditions, and relations of power and domination. While Beck highlights new political forms and modes of acting through newly observable and emerging ambivalences, he hardly addresses the conditions these new forms of political agency are embedded in. These aspects, however, are crucial for Bhabha. His use of ambivalence highlights the instability of colonial power relations, pointing at a potential for political agency, while avoiding the disavowal of the powerful relation between colonizers and colonized. He identifies this relation as one that may be altered, opened up, and reorganized, but also as one that should never be ignored in its powerful dimensions. Engel's notion of paradox follows a similar path. For her, thinking in terms of paradox allows for the recognition of the ways the plurality of possibilities is impeded – as in regard to a binary gender order. Paradox embraces that some identities, positions, or meanings are more likely to be recognized than others, without necessarily changing the underlying structures of inequality. The frame of multistability makes it possible to emphasize that neither ambivalence nor paradox are simply to be affirmed. Unlike multiplicity – which would merely privilege a plurality of possibilities, dissolution, and multiplication – ambivalence and paradox in terms of multistability inform both possibilities and impossibilities.

Addressing the heuristic tool of multistability as opposed to multiplicity can help shift our attention to relations of power and domination, as well as to the question of making decisions under these conditions. However, its potential is also limited. Picturing mainly dualistic models – like the Rubin vase or Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit – multistability also evokes what Bhabha and Engel are criticizing: that is, a rigid

binary logic, with seemingly coherent, unchangeable positions, perspectives, or identities. Therefore I suggest that the potential of the proposed models of ambivalence can best be understood through the figures of multiplicity *and* multistability. While multiplicity accentuates a multiplication of possibilities, and offers a frame against monocausality and finality, ultimately also irritating stabilities, multistability also highlights the forces of existing stabilities and how these relate to activities and decisions – however limited these decisions may be. As such, these activities also comprise mechanisms of producing, adjusting to, and reworking different aspects. They imply political agency as a force of change and/or maintenance. Invoking these aspects of decision and activity also relates to the question of the subject. All four theories of ambivalence or paradox take into consideration, though differently, the subject. Political subjects beyond traditional institutions lie at the heart of Beck's reinvention of the political. For Bhabha and Engel, the constitution of the (colonial, gendered, and sexualized) subject embedded in binary power structures is crucial to their analysis. Like Bauman, Engel highlights ideological dimensions of subject constitution.<sup>39</sup> In both approaches, subjects are part of ideological interpellation processes, either in terms of modern beliefs in certainty or as neoliberal paradoxical demands between freedom and responsibility. As Bhabha also reveals, subjects are both challenged to deal with ambivalent and paradoxical conditions while participating in their production and reproduction.

Like these approaches, Henri Lefebvre's theory offers a perspective on political agency that challenges determinism without ignoring dimensions of power and repression. I suggest understanding his theorizing of ambivalence and ambiguity along the lines of the interrelated figures of multiplicity and multistability. However, his perspective also adds something to this framework and the elaborated figures of ambivalence. While all four theories of ambivalence deal with the question of the subject, Lefebvre's approach furthermore introduces the following questions: How can we theorize individuals being caught in particular situations? What are the specific modes and mechanisms of their bindings and entanglements?

The French Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991) is often mentioned alongside thinkers like Theodor W. Adorno, Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukács, and Herbert Marcuse.<sup>40</sup> His work, however, has for a long time been little appreciated compared to these theoreticians, resulting in Lefebvre even being conceived as the ‘ignored philosopher’ during his lifetime.<sup>41</sup> Currently, he is probably best known within the fields of critical geography and urban studies.<sup>42</sup> His book *The Production of Space* (1974) has been highly influential for the so-called spatial turn in social and cultural studies. Besides this well-known work, it is Lefebvre’s long-term thinking about the everyday that may be regarded as the core of his theorization. His interest in the everyday had already emerged in the 1920s and remained his further concern until the 1980s, most explicitly in his trilogy on the *Critique of Everyday Life*.<sup>43</sup> Against the long-held philosophical neglect of the everyday, which, according to Lefebvre, was only partially overcome by Karl Marx’s introduction of labour and ‘real life’ into philosophy, Lefebvre develops a critical theory of everyday life, inquiring into modern capitalist times and how these relate to everyday practices.<sup>44</sup> He describes the everyday as a ‘complex phenomenon’ that is both a ‘capitalist mode of production’ and a ‘modality of administering society’,<sup>45</sup> and argues that capitalism resides in daily practices, where it hides its immanent force and manages to survive. But it is also in everyday life that a revolutionary transformation of society has to be realized. The everyday is therefore not an autonomous sphere that is either conceived as alienated or ‘assigned to resistant subordinates’.<sup>46</sup> For Lefebvre, the everyday is an assemblage of practices deeply embedded in political power relations. Thus, a critique of everyday life also allows for a critique of the political sphere. Or, in Lefebvre’s words, a critique of everyday life ‘encompasses a critique of the political realms by everyday social practice and vice versa’.<sup>47</sup>

Against the background of these political and theoretical premises, I consider Lefebvre’s theory of the everyday, and especially his notions of ambivalence and ambiguity, to be productive in so far as it allows for sharpening an understanding of ambivalence in a way that ultimately can inspire a theory of the political.

'The everyday is ambiguous and contradictory'<sup>48</sup> Lefebvre writes. In the second volume of the *Critique of Everyday Life*, he identifies ambiguity as one of twelve specific categories of everyday life, indicating at the same time that a distinction exists between ambiguity and ambivalence (though he never fully elucidates it). Taking up this little elaborated distinction, I suggest mapping his notion of ambiguity as distinct from, but related to, ambivalence. My reading draws on Lefebvre's understanding of ambiguity elaborated in the first volume of the *Critique of Everyday Life*, in which he develops some of the central features of his notion of ambiguity. Turning to this early conceptualization, I argue, helps to tease out the differentiation, but also the connection, between ambiguity and ambivalence that infuses his later work.

In order to clarify an understanding of ambivalence and ambiguity, it might be useful to examine the current meanings of these two notions: not only since ambiguity and ambivalence are often used interchangeably, but also since Lefebvre suggests a rather uncommon usage that nevertheless may be better understood in reference to the more common one. Ambiguity dates back to the fifteenth century, while ambivalence only to the twentieth century.<sup>49</sup> In the *Oxford English Dictionary* ambivalence is defined as the 'coexistence in one person of contradictory emotions or attitudes (as love and hatred) towards a person or thing'.<sup>50</sup> It refers to a state of mixed and even contradictory feelings towards something or someone. In its definition of ambiguity, by contrast, the *Oxford English Dictionary* mentions 'uncertainty' and 'dubity' as well as the meaning of a 'word or phrase susceptible of more than one meaning; an equivocal expression'. Furthermore, it differentiates between a subjective and an objective use of the idea. The subjective understanding – which indicates a 'wavering of opinion; hesitation, doubt, uncertainty, as to one's course' – is, however, conceived to be outdated and obsolete. Instead, the current usage refers to the objective understanding, that is, the 'capability of being understood in two or more ways; double or dubious signification, ambiguousness'. Interestingly, the subjective use of ambiguity and the notion of ambivalence seem close to one another, as both relate to an inner state: one of uncertainty (for ambiguity) or even of conflict (for ambivalence). The common understanding, however, distinguishes ambivalence in terms of an inner dimension from ambiguity as a multiplicity of meanings and significations, revealing also a disciplinary dimension. Linguistic dictionaries

mainly refer to the notion of ambiguity, invoking processes of signification and indicating that a signifier can be interpreted in different ways; the notion of ambivalence emerges out of psychology and psychoanalysis, referring to an affective ambivalence such as love–hate, as Sigmund Freud and Eugen Bleuler have explained it.<sup>51</sup>

This distinction between a psychological phenomenon (ambivalence as personal inner conflict or as conflicting affective attitudes) and a linguistic phenomenon (ambiguity as a plurality of meanings) is similarly echoed in Lefebvre. He reveals a general tendency to emphasize a distinction between psychological ambivalences and sociological ambiguities. Here, ambivalence refers to the conflict of an individual, while ambiguity defines a condition that is ‘offered to an individual’.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, Lefebvre’s position towards this distinction remains somehow blurry. On the one hand, he criticizes certain philosophers’ efforts to transform the sociological category of ambiguity into an ontological one, as this is impossible because ‘ambiguity prevents awareness of ambiguity’.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, he argues that ambiguity can never last, but has a beginning and an end. Here, he emphasizes moments of illumination, moments where ‘ambiguity bursts asunder in contradictions’ – contradictions between the ‘possibilities longed for and disappointingly fulfilled’.<sup>54</sup> I draw on this last idea, that is, the moment of becoming explicit and of the unfolding of ambiguity, because this moment can be tied to Lefebvre’s expression of ambivalence. It allows us to elaborate a complex understanding of conditions, processes, and events, and therefore helps to address the question of political agency as a question of how individuals are attached to, and at the same time involved in, the re/production of historical moments. I suggest understanding Lefebvre’s considerations in terms of transgressing a disciplinarily guided distinction between ambivalence and ambiguity. Ambivalence and ambiguity then do not refer to a distinction between inner conflicts and conflicting conditions, but between virtual polarities and a manifest conflict: that is, between indifference and the need to decide.

It is in the extended re-edition of the first volume of the *Critique of Everyday Life* that Lefebvre foregrounds an understanding of ambiguity, relating it to the idea of praxis.<sup>55</sup> Emphasizing praxis does not mean pointing merely to processes and the idea of transformation, since one of praxis’ essential tenets concerns decisions. Praxis, Lefebvre argues, implies the ‘requirement to act and to make decisions’; praxis ‘imposes choice’.<sup>56</sup> This understanding of praxis and decision becomes decisive

for his deployment of ambiguity. Whereas ambiguity suggests different and coexisting possibilities, Lefebvre explains that this – even sometimes charming – ‘state of possibility’<sup>57</sup> can never endure. Ambiguity’s coexisting possibilities are rather constantly interrupted through decisions, choices, and judgements. In Lefebvre’s view, both philosophers and psychologists have largely ignored this practical materialist dimension of ambiguity. They have ‘confused the issue [of ambiguity] by sometimes attributing this “being-there” of results to consciousness or being, rather than to action and decisions’.<sup>58</sup> Within such a frame, ambiguity is reduced either to an ontological phenomenon or to a state of cognition. Here, Lefebvre closely follows Marx’s double critique of contemporary philosophy that emphasizes abstract thinking or being without acting.<sup>59</sup> Like Marx, Lefebvre highlights the material as well as the practical and transformative dimension. ‘[F]rom the ambiguity of consciousness and situations’ he argues, ‘spring forth actions, events, results, without warning.’<sup>60</sup> He adds: ‘These, at least, have clear-cut outlines. They maintain a hard, incisive objectivity which constantly disperse the luminous vapours of ambiguity – only to let them rise once again.’<sup>61</sup> Lefebvre indicates a relation of tension that is opened between ambiguities and the always-present necessity of judging and making decisions. Ambiguities and decisions are thus closely related, as they mark permanently fluctuating modes. In their complexity and connection, they embrace a process and indicate a transformation in time.

Lefebvre further explores this tension between ambiguity and decision in the second volume of his *Critique of Everyday Life*. I suggest that paying attention to the distinction he draws between ambiguity and ambivalence allows for a more precise theorization of the interplay between decisions and ambiguity, and thus for conceptualizing how individuals are not only caught in, but also create, particular situations. Contradictions, Lefebvre argues, are closely linked to both ambivalence and ambiguity. Yet, he identifies a different exigency in the need to decide. Ambivalence either points to the immediate need to decide, or to the fact that a decision has already been made: ‘In the case of ambivalence it is within the consciousness of an active individual that the problem of conflict emerges; with his back to the wall, he has to choose.’<sup>62</sup> On the contrary, there is no need to decide when it comes to ambiguity. Here, the individual ‘adopts a kind of temporary and undisciplined indifference; one day, soon perhaps, he will have to opt; but the moment of choice has not yet arrived’.<sup>63</sup> In contrast to dictionaries’ defi-

nitions that anchor ambivalence within an individual's attitude, I understand Lefebvre's notion of ambivalence as describing the position taken towards a specific contradictory situation where the immanent force of contradictions – of past and present – become explicit because of this need to make a decision. Ambivalence is at the same time an unfolding and a suspension of ambiguity; it expresses a moment of practice. While ambivalence indicates a conflict, a compelling challenge vis-à-vis an emerging problem, the notion of ambiguity offers an understanding of the variety of possibilities at work at a certain moment. Ambiguity does not necessarily evoke controversy, but rather 'several virtual polarities'.<sup>64</sup> It includes the gesture of a coming decision, implying, however, its final suspension.

#### AMBIVALENCE = AMBIGUITY + DECISION

Following Lefebvre's explanations, I suggest reading ambivalence and ambiguity as closely related, elucidated in the equation  $\text{ambivalence} = \text{ambiguity} + \text{decision}$ . Such a reading may also be pushed to Lefebvre's mention of a 'dialectical movement', present in the expression 'ambiguity/decision'.<sup>65</sup> I propose embracing this dialectical mode with Lefebvre's notion of ambivalence, and thus relating ambiguity and ambivalence for four conceptual reasons.<sup>66</sup> My reading draws on his earlier reflections on ambiguities interrupted by decisions. In his first volume of the *Critique of Everyday Life*, he observes that the "yes and no" of ambiguity and the suspension of judgment' are replaced 'with the dilemma of action'.<sup>67</sup> In the second volume, I argue, he explores the notion of ambivalence in order to think through this moment of replacement. As I have demonstrated earlier, Lefebvre identifies ambivalence as the very moment of decision. Ambivalence unfolds at the time when suspension comes to an end. Ambiguity, in contrast, is shaped by a variety of possibilities, none of which has to be chosen immediately; it marks indifference. Theorizing ambivalence as an indispensable need to decide, and as immediacy of conflict, allows us to picture how ambiguity and decision-making may be juxtaposed and woven together, since ambivalence is both the end and the visibility of ambiguity. Ambivalence may then be understood as the manifestation of ambiguity. It reveals that ambiguities are at the same time interrupted and illuminated. Hence, ambivalence and ambiguity are two parts of an interrelated ensemble – an assemblage – that is constituted through practices, judgements, and action. Exposing ambivalence in this manner (alluded to in the equation



ambivalence = ambiguity + decision), allows one to emphasize four crucial conceptional aspects:

First, I would like to highlight the moments of practice, action, and becoming, and therefore ambivalence's transformative force. Relating ambivalence and ambiguity does not draw on the idea of static ensembles. Rather, ambivalence indicates both a transitional and a revealing moment: ambivalence is transitional in so far as judgements and decisions transform the virtual conflictual potential of ambiguity into the immediate force of conflict. It is revealing because it is in the moment of decision-making that ambiguity is unfolded as ambivalence. Within the moment of decision-making, contradictions become striking and visible while, at the same time, the moment itself is altered. Lefebvre writes: 'decision simplifies the complex situation and the ambiguity, and by the very act of simplifying them, transforms them. [...] And that is when ambiguity reveals itself to be what it is: uncontrolled complexity, confusion, opaqueness.'<sup>68</sup> It is this moment of decision-making that points to the idea of praxis, instituting a juxtaposition between ambiguity and judgement.

Second, acting, deciding, and the transformative force also reveal a temporal dimension. This dimension transpires not only in featuring transformation, but also in Lefebvre's description of a permanent, continuous play where conditions of ambiguity are constantly and repeatedly interrupted by actions. On the one hand, Lefebvre stresses that modifications are an effect of decisions. Ambiguities are not only interrupted through moments of decision but are also simplified and transformed. On the other hand, he draws attention to the insight that, despite these decisions and simplifications, ambiguities also keep returning, though never fully identically. Interruptions are instantaneous, not infinite, and as such they indicate an event and a transformation at the same time.

Third, I would like to highlight the equation ambivalence = ambiguity + decision in terms of conceptualizing ambiguity as the condition of possibility for ambivalence/decisions. I do not claim that thinking of ambivalence as a mode of decision implies an endless possibility of choices. Neither do I suggest that Lefebvre's emphasis on acting and deciding should be understood as certainty in opposition to the uncertainties of ambiguity. Here, ambivalence and ambiguity allude to the figures of multistability and multiplicity. Engaging ambivalence in relation to ambiguity is meaningful in a double way: it stresses the point

that through practices, the conditions of these practices may also be revealed and made visible. Hence, focusing on practices not only sheds light on actions and decisions, but also illuminates their conditions of possibility. Furthermore, emphasizing these conditions also embraces the limits of possible decisions. Echoing multistability, theorizing decisions in the light of ambivalence highlights how decisions are always connected to the demands and forces of a particular historical moment.

Fourth, emphasizing decisions leads us to the question and possibility of making adequate decisions. Lefebvre denies such a possibility and concedes that, 'according to the circumstances and conjunctures, decisions begin with an assessment which, to a certain extent, runs the risk of making a mistake in the present and of failing in the future'.<sup>69</sup> For him, decisions neither take place in a social vacuum, nor rely on total knowledge at a certain moment. This argument can further be grounded if we return to the first volume of the *Critique of Everyday Life*, where Lefebvre offers a thoughtful reading that illuminates both the relative contingency and the embeddedness of decisions. Referring to Bertolt Brecht's idea of the *Verfremdungseffekt*, Lefebvre attempts to elucidate the coexistence of the need to decide and of the impossibility to make clear-cut decisions. For Brecht's epic theatre, Lefebvre explains, does not offer perfect figures for the audience to identify with. Rather, they are to some extent 'unsympathetic, irritating', and produce 'disagreement, divergence, distortion'.<sup>70</sup> The audience, however, is forced into the plays; it 'cannot relax' but must 'take sides'. After weighing the possibilities, spectators have to decide and therefore become 'the living consciousness of the contradictions of the real'.<sup>71</sup>

#### AMBIVALENCE AND THE POLITICAL

Ambivalence and ambiguity – as I have argued with Lefebvre – are not separable, but are related to each other, revealing their interconnections through practices, actions, and decisions. Taking up this conceptualization, I will in this last section return to the question of how such a concept of ambivalence inspires a theory of the political. Exploring Lefebvre's notion of ambivalence, I emphasize the question of agency, mapped through a perspective on subjects, power, structures, and strategies.

Embracing decision is one of Lefebvre's crucial elements towards conceptualizing ambivalence and ambiguity.<sup>72</sup> I suggest a notion of decision as part of a theory of the political, without claiming that all decisions are political. Instead, I argue that integrating the conceptual potential of decision helps to acknowledge a perspective on the subjects for a theory of the political. For such a theory should not only investigate power in terms of structures and its relations, but should also take into account that (and also how) subjects, as well as their actions, decisions, and practices are part of these relations. Theorizing decisions under conditions of ambiguity provides a way of thinking about how individuals perpetuate and alter their own living and political conditions at the same time. This understanding also resonates with Lefebvre's framework, where he does not start from an autonomous subject and does not fall prey to the fantasy of a sovereign life. Subjects are rather conceived as subjects in a world. They are not completely intentional subjects, but agents who are simultaneously passive and active. While they are pulled into certain conditions, conditions they have themselves neither chosen nor produced, they are obliged to make decisions and choose certain positions. Lefebvre does not stop at the micro-political level, but considers individual decisions and actions as deeply embedded in particular conditions. For him, individuals are part of these relations and may attach to, adapt, or even dismiss certain situations. Thus, subjects are directly involved in political and social contradictions and not merely neutral bearers of complex situations. This understanding of agency also transpires in Lefebvre's theory of everyday life in which he asks how capitalism – in his terms neo-capitalism – not only enters, but is also invested in the everyday practices of the ordinary. As Alice Kaplan and Kristin Ross have explained: 'The Political [...] is hidden in the everyday, exactly where it is most obvious: in the contradictions of lived experience.'<sup>73</sup>

While emphasizing individuals' ambivalent involvement in power relations exposes the question of the subject, it also refers to impediments related to political, economic, and ideological structures. Individuals are thrown into conditions they have not created themselves. But they contribute to affirming as well as altering these conditions in their daily practices. As Homi Bhabha has argued, power relations do not stay exactly the same. Ambivalence, like the figure of multistability, identifies the potentialities of an opening while, at the same time, reproducing certain power structures.

Decisions and practices mark, as I have developed, the possibility, but also the need to choose and to make a judgement. This does not imply the possibility of choosing everything. Lefebvre neither assumes that decisions are taken under neutral conditions, nor postulates that decisions merely rely on having sufficient time or thorough knowledge. Instead, he emphasizes a need to decide despite the impossibility of considering ‘all’ possible pros and cons. This means that he does not simply refer to the *possibility*, but also to the *necessity*, of decision-making. He reveals a powerful dimension, a coercive mode in daily practices, in which people have to take decisions continuously, whether they like it or not – without theorizing the literal form of attachment to political, economic, and ideological structures. Thinking of ambivalence as the necessary interruption of ambiguity negates the idea of wilfulness and, instead, illustrates a dimension of requirement and even coercion at work in such instances.

The suggestion of theorizing the political from the perspective of the subjects’ practices and decisions connects to current understandings of the political as taking decisions under conditions of undecidability. Whereas these current debates emphasize the dimension of undecidability, arguing for the impossibility of final grounds, I shift the view to the aspect of decisions, emphasizing what Engel also acknowledges: ‘One cannot avoid taking actions.’<sup>74</sup> Like her, I want to stress the contingency of particular actions and decisions. As I have argued, decisions are not conceptualized as results of extensive reasoning. Following Lefebvre, they are also the effects of the very necessity to decide, providing therefore a critique of totality, rationality, and coherence.

Lefebvre’s approach to ambivalence and ambiguity also helps to transgress ‘linguistic propositions’<sup>75</sup> or a ‘fetishism of form’<sup>76</sup> and instead introduces a material dimension. Lefebvre explicitly places ambivalences within daily practices. In line with Marx, he emphasizes ‘real individuals’ in their ‘real life-process’.<sup>77</sup> Following this practical turn, his approach may challenge current theories of the political. While these approaches, highlighting the impossibilities of final grounds, distinguish between a kind of metaphysical sphere of ‘the political’ in opposition to the sphere of ‘politics’, all the while privileging the former, Lefebvre’s vision of ambivalence as grounded in daily practices allows for theorizing the political from the point of view of individuals’ daily lives, their activities, and the material conditions under which they live. Lefebvre’s assemblage of ambivalence and ambiguity speaks less of metaphysical

claims and rather offers a theory of practices that takes the political and economic conditions of these practices into account.

Furthermore, Lefebvre's definition of ambivalence embodies within itself a dimension of conflict. His framework reveals a tension between decision-making and ambiguous (for example, political, economic, and ideological) conditions. Recalling the figures of multiplicity and multi-stability I have argued for an interrelated understanding: one that not only highlights plurality, but also reflects that some possibilities are more likely than others, and that different standpoints, mechanisms, and possibilities may also be in conflict with each other. Also, the complex ambivalence–ambiguity logic as suggested by Lefebvre does not claim an endless plurality of possibilities. It assumes permanent tensions between ambiguities and decisions being made. Theorizing ambivalence as decision plus ambiguity embraces the idea of a situation where particular ambivalences become apparent. This points at the necessity to bring to light existing and often disempowering closures in particular situations, calling for a critique of existing power relations. It asks for the sites and situations where these relations, norms, and constraints become visible and coercive in everyday practices.

Considering ambivalence as a moment where multiple and incoherent (in Lefebvre's terminology) ambiguous conditions are brought to light, finally provides crucial insights for theorizing political strategies. A politics of ambivalence neither suggests legitimizing ambivalences – such as those between freedom and responsibility, which are constitutive of neoliberal politics – nor suggests making them coherent. Nor does it allude to proclaiming ambivalence as a normative principle. Lefebvre argues that in the immediacy of certain situations – which I suggested calling ambivalence – ambiguities collapse while also becoming visible. Hence, a politics of ambivalence foregrounds the revelation of power relations as, for instance, heteronormativity. It accentuates the need for tracking contradictory forces and bringing them to light. Unlike a politics of paradox, ambivalence does not refer to a political goal, but instead emphasizes unfolding, even disturbing, moments of manifestation. Thinking the political through ambivalence allows us to ask where, how, and under which conditions contradictions operate. Only then is it possible to ask whether particular ambivalences are not only coercive, but also politically emancipatory and therefore should be kept alive.

Conceptualizing ambivalence as an informative political notion enables a reworking of the political in terms of decisions and political agency. This neither assumes an over-reliance on the event nor on the individual's political potentiality. Relating ambivalence and ambiguity from the site of the everyday allows us to theorize how subjects are binding and bound to particular situations and events. It accounts for the complex and contradictory conditions that individuals are encountering, accommodating, and shaping, and emphasizes a materialist, process-oriented understanding of the political.

## NOTES

- 1 I wish to thank the ICI colloquium 2010/11 and especially Christoph Holzhey, as well as K. Heintzman, Gundula Ludwig, and Sandrine Sanos for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.
- 2 Beyond the following theories, cf. *Befreiung aus der Mündigkeit: Paradoxien des gegenwärtigen Kapitalismus*, ed. by Axel Honneth (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 2002); *Amphibolie – Ambiguität – Ambivalenz*, ed. by Frauke Berndt and Stephan Kammer (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2009); *Ambiguität in der Kunst: Typen und Funktionen eines ästhetischen Paradigmas*, ed. by Verena Krieger and Rachel Mader (Köln: Böhlau, 2010).
- 3 See also Brigitte Bargetz, *Ambivalenzen des Alltags* (Bielefeld: transcript, forthcoming in 2014).
- 4 Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 1.
- 5 Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 99.
- 6 Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).
- 7 I refer to 'Western' in brackets in order to indicate where Bauman refers to it without naming it explicitly.
- 8 Bauman, *Ambivalence*, p. 1.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid., pp. 2, 15, and 1.
- 11 Ibid., p. 6.
- 12 Ibid., p. 15.
- 13 Ibid., p. 50.
- 14 Ibid., pp. 15 and 7.
- 15 Ibid., pp. 235 and 197.
- 16 Ibid., p. 16.
- 17 Ulrich Beck, *The Reinvention of Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), p. 142.
- 18 Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards New Modernity* (London: Sage Publications, 1992).
- 19 Ibid., p. 1.
- 20 Beck, *Reinvention*, p. 102.

- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid., pp. 94–109.
- 23 In *Risk Society* Beck deals more explicitly with different risks while highlighting the political possibilities in *The Reinvention of Politics*.
- 24 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 121.
- 25 Ibid., p. 131.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid., p. 126.
- 28 Ibid., pp. 129–30.
- 29 For a critique of a missing feminist perspective in Bhabha's approach see, for example, Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
- 30 Antke Engel, 'Desiring Tension: Towards a Queer Politics of Paradox', in *Tension/Spannung*, ed. by Christoph F. E. Holzhey (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2010), pp. 227–50.
- 31 Ibid., p. 227.
- 32 Ibid., pp. 243 and 227.
- 33 Ibid., p. 244.
- 34 Cf. Antke Engel, *Bilder von Sexualität und Ökonomie: Queere kulturelle Politiken im Neoliberalismus* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2009), p. 117.
- 35 Ibid., p. 126.
- 36 Engel, 'Desiring Tension', p. 231.
- 37 Cf. Engel, *Bilder*, p. 41. Engel uses the expression 'toleranzpluralistische Integration' (integration through tolerance pluralism).
- 38 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations (Philosophische Untersuchungen)*, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe, reissued 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).
- 39 See also Pascale Gillot's article in this volume.
- 40 Michel Trebitsch, 'Preface', in Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, 3 vols (London: Verso, 1992–2008), 1: *Introduction* (1992), pp. ix–xxviii (p. ix).
- 41 Stanley Aronowitz, 'The Ignored Philosopher and Social Theorist: On the Work of Henri Lefebvre', *Situations: Project of the Radical Imagination*, 2 (2007), pp. 133–55.
- 42 For recent research on Lefebvre cf. Bargetz, *Ambivalenzen*; Michael E. Gardiner, *Critiques of Everyday Life* (London: Haase, 2000); Ben Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002); Andy Merrifield, *Henri Lefebvre: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Michael Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Rob Shields, *Lefebvre, Love and Struggle: Spatial Dialectics* (London: Routledge, 1999).
- 43 In the 1920s Henri Lefebvre's interest in the everyday arose in relation to the Surrealists. His first publication on the everyday, *Mystification: Notes for a Critique of Everyday Life*, was published in 1933 and was followed by the three volumes of the *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947, re-edited with a new introduction in 1958; 1961; 1981). Besides many other texts referring to the everyday, I want to highlight two equally important books: *Everyday Life in the Modern*

*World*, which was published in 1968 on the eve of the students' uprising in Paris/Nanterre, where Lefebvre had held a professorship since 1965, and *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, first published in French in 1992, one year after his death. For the English editions, see: *Critique of Everyday Life*, 3 vols (London: Verso, 1992–2008), I: *Introduction* (1991), II: *Foundations for a Sociology of Everyday Life* (2002), III: *From Modernity to Modernism: Towards a Metaphilosophy of Daily Life* (2008); *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (London: Continuum, 2002); *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (London: Continuum, 2004).

- 44 Lefebvre has published widely on Marx's work – he is probably most known for his introduction to Marxism in the popular French series *Que sais-je* – and he had an important influence for the establishment of French Marxism after the Second World War. He had also been a member of the French Communist Party (PCF) until he got expelled in 1957.
- 45 Henri Lefebvre, 'Toward a Leftist Cultural Politics: Remarks Occasioned by the Centenary of Marx's Death', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Lawrence Grossberg and Cary Nelson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 75–88 (p. 80).
- 46 Stephen Crook, 'Minotaurs and Other Monsters: Everyday Life in Recent Social Theory', *Sociology*, 32 (1998), pp. 523–40 (p. 536).
- 47 Lefebvre, *Critique*, II, p. 19.
- 48 Lefebvre, 'Toward a Leftist Cultural Politics', p. 80.
- 49 *Oxford English Dictionary: The Definitive Record of the English Language*, 2nd edn (1989) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/6144>> [accessed 23 January 2012].
- 50 For the following, cf. *ibid.*
- 51 Cf. *Metzler-Lexikon Literatur- und Kulturtheorie: Ansätze, Personen, Grundbegriffe* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2008), p. 17; *Metzler-Lexikon Sprache* (Stuttgart/Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 2008), p. 34; Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Quadrige, PUF, 2007), pp. 19–22.
- 52 Lefebvre, *Critique*, II, p. 222.
- 53 *Ibid.*, p. 223.
- 54 *Ibid.*, p. 222.
- 55 The English translation at this point is rather misleading: 'Practically, the requirement to act and to make decisions imposes choices' (Lefebvre, *Critique*, I, p. 19). The French original says: 'La pratique, c'est-à-dire l'exigence de l'acte et de la décision, impose le choix.' (Henri Lefebvre, *Critique de la vie quotidienne* (Paris: L'Arche, 1958), pp. 26–27.)
- 56 Lefebvre, *Critique*, I, p. 19.
- 57 *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- 58 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- 59 Marx's former reproach refers to Hegel, the latter to Feuerbach.
- 60 Lefebvre, *Critique*, I, p. 18.
- 61 *Ibid.*
- 62 Lefebvre, *Critique*, II, p. 220.
- 63 *Ibid.*



- 64 Ibid., p. 220.
- 65 Ibid., p. 225.
- 66 Lefebvre, in contrast, puts the notion of ambiguity at the forefront of his theory of everyday life.
- 67 Lefebvre, *Critique*, II, p. 225.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 Lefebvre, *Critique*, I, pp. 22 and 21.
- 71 Ibid., p. 21.
- 72 This reference to decision as a moment of the political evokes Carl Schmitt's decisionism. Addressing decision, however, I will not refer to his friend-enemy distinction as a characteristic idea for the political, but rather will focus on the question of agency.
- 73 Alice Kaplan and Kristin Ross, 'Introduction', *Yale French Studies*, 73 (1987), pp. 1–4 (p. 3).
- 74 Engel, 'Desiring Tension', p. 231.
- 75 Ibid., p. 230.
- 76 McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, pp. 63–64. She writes: 'Locating agency in ambivalence runs the risk of what can be called a fetishism of form: the projection of historical agency onto formal abstractions that are anthropomorphized and given life of their own. Here abstractions become historical actors.'
- 77 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, 42 vols (Berlin: Dietz, 1969), III: *Die deutsche Ideologie: Kritik der neuesten deutschen Philosophie in ihren Repräsentanten Feuerbach, B. Bauer und Stirner, und des deutsche Sozialismus in seinen verschiedenen Propheten*.

Brigitte Bargetz, 'Figuring Ambivalence, Capturing the Political: An Everyday Perspective', in *Multistable Figures: On the Critical Potential of Ir/Reversible Aspect-Seeing*, ed. by Christoph F. E. Holzhey, *Cultural Inquiry*, 8 (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2014), pp. 191–214 <[https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-08\\_09](https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-08_09)>

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